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## NEGRO HISTORY

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### THE NEGROES OF CINCINNATI PRIOR TO THE CIVIL WAR

The study of the history of the Negroes of Cincinnati is unusually important for the reason that from no other annals do we get such striking evidence that the colored people generally thrive when encouraged by their white neighbors. This story is otherwise significant when we consider the fact that about a fourth of the persons of color settling in the State of Ohio during the first half of the last century made their homes in this city. Situated on a north bend of the Ohio where commerce breaks bulk, Cincinnati rapidly developed, attracting both foreigners and Americans, among whom were not a few Negroes. Exactly how many persons of color were in this city during the first decade of the nineteenth century is not yet known. It has been said that there were no Negroes in Hamilton County in 1800.<sup>1</sup> It is evident, too, that the real exodus of free Negroes and fugitives from the South to the Northwest Territory did not begin prior to 1815, although their attention had been earlier directed to this section as a more desirable place for colonization than the shores of Africa.<sup>2</sup> As the reaction following the era of good feeling toward the Negroes during the revolutionary period had not reached its climax free per-

<sup>1</sup> Quillin, "The Color Line in Ohio," 18.

<sup>2</sup> "Tyrannical Libertymen," 10-11; Locke, "Antislavery," 31-32; Branagan, "Serious Remonstrance," 18.

sons of color had been content to remain in the South.<sup>3</sup> The unexpected immigration of these Negroes into this section and the last bold effort made to drive them out marked epochs in their history in this city. The history of these people prior to the Civil War, therefore, falls into three periods, one of toleration from 1800 to 1826, one of persecution from 1826 to 1841, and one of amelioration from 1841 to 1861.

In the beginning the Negroes were not a live issue in Cincinnati. The question of their settlement in that community was debated but resulted in great diversity of opinion rather than a fixedness of judgment among the citizens. The question came up in the Constitutional Convention of 1802 and provoked some discussion, but reaching no decision, the convention simply left the Negroes out of the pale of the newly organized body politic, discriminating against them together with Indians and foreigners, by incorporating the word white into the fundamental law.<sup>4</sup> The legislature to which the disposition of this question was left, however, took it up in 1804 to calm the fears of those who had more seriously considered the so-called menace of Negro immigration. This body enacted a law, providing that no Negro or mulatto should be allowed to remain permanently in that State, unless he could furnish a certificate of freedom issued by some court in the United States. Negroes then living there had to be registered before the following June, giving the names of their children. No man could employ a Negro who could not show such a certificate. Hiring a delinquent black or harboring or hindering the capture of a runaway was punishable by a fine of \$50 and the owner of a fugitive thus illegally employed could recover fifty cents a day for the services of his slave.<sup>5</sup>

As the fear of Negro immigration increased the law of 1804 was found to be inadequate. In 1807, therefore, the legislature enacted another measure providing that no Negro should be permitted to settle in Ohio unless he could

<sup>3</sup> Woodson, "The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861," 230-231.

<sup>4</sup> Constitution, Article I, Sections 2, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Laws of Ohio, II, 63.

within twenty days give a bond to the amount of \$500, guaranteeing his good behavior and support. The fine for concealing a fugitive was raised from \$50 to \$100, one half of which should go to the informer. Negro evidence against the white man was prohibited.<sup>6</sup> This law together with that of 1830 making the Negro ineligible for service in the State militia, that of 1831 depriving persons of color of the privilege of serving upon juries, and that of 1838 prohibiting the education of colored children at the expense of the State, constituted what were known as the "Black Laws."<sup>7</sup>

Up to 1826, however, the Negroes of Cincinnati had not become a cause of much trouble. Very little mention of them is made in the records of this period. They were not wanted in this city but were tolerated as a negligible factor. D. B. Warden, a traveler through the West in 1819, observed that the blacks of Cincinnati were "good-humoured, garrulous, and profligate, generally disinclined to laborious occupations, and prone to the performance of light and menial drudgery." Here the traveler was taking effect for cause. "Some few," said he, "exercise the humbler trades, and some appear to have formed a correct conception of the objects and value of property, and are both industrious and economical. A large proportion of them are reputed, and perhaps correctly, to be habituated to petit larceny." But this had not become a grave offence, for he said that not more than one individual had been corporally punished by the courts since the settlement of the town.<sup>8</sup>

When, however, the South reached the conclusion that free Negroes were an evil, and Quakers and philanthropists began to direct these unfortunates to the Northwest Territory for colonization, a great commotion arose in Southern Ohio and especially in Cincinnati.<sup>9</sup> How rapid this movement was, may be best observed by noticing the statistics of

<sup>6</sup> Laws of Ohio, V, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Hickok, "The Negro in Ohio," 41, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Warden, "Statistical, Political and Historical Account of the United States of North America," 264.

<sup>9</sup> Quillin, "The Color Line in Ohio," 32.

this period. There were 337 Negroes in Ohio in 1800; 1,890 in 1810; 4,723 in 1820; 9,586 in 1830; 17,342 in 1840; and 25,279 in 1850.<sup>10</sup> Now Cincinnati had 410 Negroes in 1819;<sup>11</sup> 690 in 1826;<sup>12</sup> 2,255 in 1840;<sup>13</sup> and 3,237 in 1850.<sup>14</sup>

It was during the period between 1826 and 1840 that Cincinnati had to grapple with the problem of the immigrating Negroes and the poor whites from the uplands of Virginia and Kentucky. With some ill-informed persons the question was whether that section should be settled by white men or Negroes. The situation became more alarming when the Southern philanthropic minority sometimes afforded a man like a master of Pittsylvania County, Virginia, who settled 70 freedmen in Lawrence County, Ohio, in one day.<sup>15</sup> It became unusually acute in Cincinnati because of the close social and commercial relations between that city and the slave States. Early in the nineteenth century Cincinnati became a manufacturing center to which the South learned to look for supplies of machinery, implements, furniture, and food.<sup>16</sup> The business men prospering thereby were not advocates of slavery but rather than lose trade by acquiring the reputation of harboring fugitive slaves or frightening away whites by encouraging the immigration of Negroes, they began to assume the attitude of driving the latter from those parts.

From this time until the forties the Negroes were a real issue in Cincinnati. During the late twenties they not only had to suffer from the legal disabilities provided in the "Black Laws," but had to withstand the humiliation of a rigid social ostracism.<sup>17</sup> They were regarded as intruders and denounced as an idle, profligate and criminal class with

<sup>10</sup> The Census of the United States, from 1800 to 1850.

<sup>11</sup> Flint's Letters in Thwaite's "Early Western Travels," IX, 239.

<sup>12</sup> Cist, "Cincinnati in 1841," 37; *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, Sept. 14, 1841.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> United States Census, 1850.

<sup>15</sup> *Ohio State Journal*, May 3, 1827; *African Repository*, III, 254.

<sup>16</sup> Abdy, "Journal of a Tour in the United States," III, 62.

<sup>17</sup> Jay, "Miscellaneous Writings on Slavery," 27, 373, 385, 387; Minutes of the Convention of the Colored People of Ohio, 1849.

whom a self-respecting white man could not afford to associate. Their children were not permitted to attend the public schools and few persons braved the inconveniences of living under the stigma of teaching a "nigger school." Negroes were not welcome in the white churches and when they secured admission thereto they had to go to the "black pew." Colored ministers were treated with very little consideration by the white clergy as they feared that they might lose caste and be compelled to give up their churches. The colored people made little or no effort to go to white theaters or hotels and did not attempt to ride in public conveyances on equal footing with members of the other race. Not even white and colored children dared to play together to the extent that such was permitted in the South.<sup>18</sup>

This situation became more serious when it extended to pursuits of labor. White laborers there, as in other Northern cities during this period, easily reached the position of thinking that it was a disgrace to work with Negroes. This prejudice was so much more inconvenient to the Negroes of Cincinnati than elsewhere because of the fact that most of the menial labor in that city was done by Germans and Irishmen. Now, since the Negroes could not follow ordinary menial occupations there was nothing left them but the lowest form of "drudgery," for which employers often preferred colored women. It was, therefore, necessary in some cases for the mother to earn the living for the family because the father could get nothing to do. A colored man could not serve as an ordinary drayman or porter without subjecting his employer to a heavy penalty.<sup>19</sup>

The trades unions were then proscribing the employment of colored mechanics. Many who had worked at skilled labor were by this prejudice forced to do drudgery or find employment in other cities. The president of a "mechanical association" was publicly tried in 1830 by that organization for the crime of assisting a colored youth to learn a trade.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Barber, "A Report on the Condition of the Colored People of Ohio," 1840.

<sup>19</sup> Proceedings of the Ohio Antislavery Convention, 1835, 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

A young man of high character, who had at the cabinet-making trade in Kentucky saved enough to purchase his freedom, came to Cincinnati about this time, seeking employment. He finally found a position in a shop conducted by an Englishman. On entering the establishment, however, the workmen threw down their tools, declaring that the Negro had to leave or that they would. The unfortunate "intruder" was accordingly dismissed. He then entered the employ of a slaveholder, who at the close of the Negro's two years of service at common labor discovered that the black was a mechanic. The employer then procured work for him as a rough carpenter. By dint of perseverance and industry this Negro within a few years became a master workman, employing at times six or eight men, but he never received a single job of work from a native-born citizen from a free State.<sup>21</sup>

The hardships of the Negroes of this city, however, had just begun. The growth of a prejudiced public opinion led not only to legal proscription and social ostracism but also to open persecution. With the cries of the Southerners for the return of fugitives and the request of white immigrants for the exclusion of Negroes from that section, came the demand to solve the problem by enforcing the "Black Laws." Among certain indulgent officials these enactments had been allowed to fall into desuetude. These very demands, however, brought forward friends as well as enemies of the colored people. Their first clash was testing the constitutionality of the law of 1807. When the question came up before the Supreme Court, this measure was upheld.<sup>22</sup> Encouraged by such support, the foes of the Negroes forced an execution of the law. The courts at first hesitated but finally took the position that the will of the people should be obeyed. The Negroes asked for ninety days to comply with the law and were given sixty. When the allotted time had expired, however, many of them had not given bonds as required. The only thing to do then was

<sup>21</sup> Proceedings of the Ohio Antislavery Convention, 1835, 19.

<sup>22</sup> *African Repository*, V, 185.

to force them to leave the city. The officials again hesitated but a mob quickly formed to relieve them of the work. This was the riot of 1829. Bands of ruffians held sway in the city for three days, as the police were unable or unwilling to restore order. Negroes were insulted on the streets, attacked in their homes, and even killed. About a thousand or twelve hundred of them found it advisable to leave for Canada West where they established the settlement known as Wilberforce.<sup>23</sup>

This upheaval, though unusually alarming, was not altogether a bad omen. It was due not only to the demands which the South was making upon the North and the fear of the loss of Southern trade, but also to the rise of the Abolition Societies, the growth of which such a riotous condition as this had materially fostered. In a word, it was the sequel of the struggle between the proslavery and the anti-slavery elements of the city. This was the time when the friends of the Negroes were doing most for them. Instead of frightening them away a group of respectable white men in that community were beginning to think that they should be trained to live there as useful citizens. Several schools and churches for them were established. The Negroes themselves provided for their own first school about 1820; but one Mr. Wing had sufficient courage to admit persons of color to his evening classes after their first efforts had failed. By 1834 many of the colored people were receiving systematic instruction.<sup>24</sup> To some enemies of these dependents it seemed that the tide was about to turn in favor of the despised cause. Negroes began to raise sums adequate to their elementary education and the students of Lane Seminary supplemented these efforts by establishing a colored mission school which offered more advanced courses and lectures on scientific subjects twice a week. These students, however, soon found themselves far in advance of public

<sup>23</sup> *African Repository*, V, 185.

<sup>24</sup> For a lengthy account of these efforts see Woodson's "The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861," 245, 328, 329; and Hickok, "The Negro in Ohio," 83, 88.



opinion.<sup>25</sup> They were censured by the faculty and to find a more congenial center for their operations they had to go to Oberlin in the Western Reserve where a larger number of persons had become interested in the cause of the despised and rejected of men.

During the years from 1833 to 1836 the situation in Cincinnati grew worse because of the still larger influx of Negroes driven from the South by intolerable conditions incident to the reaction against the race. To solve this problem various schemes were brought forth. Augustus Wattles tells us that he appeared in Cincinnati about this time and induced numbers of the Negroes to go to Mercer County, Ohio, where they took up 30,000 acres of land.<sup>26</sup> Others went to Indiana and purchased large tracts on the public domain.<sup>27</sup> Such a method, however, seemed rather slow to the militant proslavery leaders who had learned not only to treat the Negroes as an evil but to denounce in the same manner the increasing number of abolitionists by whom it was said the Negroes were encouraged to immigrate into the State.

The spirit of the proslavery sympathizers was well exhibited in the upheaval which soon followed. This was the riot of July 30, 1836. It was an effort to destroy the abolition organ, *The Philanthropist*, edited by James G. Birney, a Southerner who had brought his slaves from Huntsville, Alabama, to Kentucky and freed them. The mob formed in the morning, went to the office of *The Philanthropist*, destroyed what printed matter they could find, threw the type into the street, and broke up the press. They then proceeded to the home of the printer, Mr. Pugh, but finding no questionable matter there, they left it undisturbed. The homes of James G. Birney, Mr. Donaldson and Dr. Colby were also threatened. The next homes to be attacked were those of Church Alley, the Negro quarter, but when two guns were fired upon the assailants they withdrew.

<sup>25</sup> Fairchild, "Oberlin: Its Origin, Progress and Results."

<sup>26</sup> Howe, "Historical Collections of Ohio," 356.

<sup>27</sup> *The Southern Workman*, XXXVII, 169.

It was reported that one man was shot but this has never been proved. The mob hesitated some time before attacking these houses again, several of the rioters declaring that they did not care to endanger their lives. A second onset was made, but it was discovered that the Negroes had deserted the quarter. On finding the houses empty the assailants destroyed their contents.<sup>28</sup>

Yet undaunted by this persistent opposition the Negroes of Cincinnati achieved so much during the years between 1835 and 1840 that they deserved to be ranked among the most progressive people of the world.<sup>29</sup> Their friends endeavored to enable them through schools, churches and industries to embrace every opportunity to rise. These 2,255 Negroes accumulated, largely during this period, \$209,000 worth of property, exclusive of personal effects and three churches valued at \$19,000. Some of this wealth consisted of land purchased in Ohio and Indiana. Furthermore, in 1839 certain colored men of the city organized "The Iron Chest Company," a real estate firm, which built three brick buildings and rented them to white men. One man, who a few years prior to 1840 had thought it useless to accumulate wealth from which he might be driven away, had changed his mind and purchased \$6,000 worth of real estate. Another Negro, who had paid \$5,000 for himself and family, had bought a home worth \$800 or \$1,000. A freedman, who was a slave until he was twenty-four years old, then had two lots worth \$10,000, paid a tax of \$40 and had 320 acres of land in Mercer County. Another, who was worth only \$3,000 in 1836, had seven houses in Cincinnati, 400 acres of land in Indiana, and another tract in the same county. He was worth \$12,000 or \$15,000. A woman who was a slave until she was thirty was then worth \$2,000. She had also come into potential possession of two houses on which a white lawyer had given her a mortgage to secure the payment of \$2,000 borrowed from this thrifty woman. Another Negro,

<sup>28</sup> For a full account see Howe, "Historical Collections of Ohio," 225-226.

<sup>29</sup> Barber, "Report on the Condition of the Colored People in Ohio," 1840, and *The Philanthropist*, July 14 and 21, 1840.

who was on the auction block in 1832, had spent \$2,600 purchasing himself and family and had bought two brick houses worth \$6,000 and 560 acres of land in Mercer County, said to be worth \$2,500.<sup>30</sup>

This unusual progress had been promoted by two forces, the development of the steamboat as a factor in transportation and the rise of the Negro mechanic. Negroes employed on vessels as servants to the travelling public amassed large sums received in the form of "tips." Furthermore, the fortunate few, constituting the stewards of these vessels, could by placing contracts for supplies and using business methods realize handsome incomes. Many Negroes thus enriched purchased real estate and went into business in Cincinnati.<sup>31</sup> The other force, the rise of the Negro mechanic, was made possible by overcoming much of the prejudice which had at first been encountered. A great change in this respect had taken place in Cincinnati by 1840. Many who had been forced to work as menial laborers then had the opportunity to show their usefulness to their families and to the community. Colored mechanics were then getting as much skilled labor as they could do. It was not uncommon for white artisans to solicit employment of colored men because they had the reputation of being better paymasters than master workmen of the more favored race.<sup>32</sup> White mechanics not only worked with colored men but often associated with them, patronized the same barber shop, and went to the same places of amusement.<sup>33</sup>

In this prosperous condition the Negroes could help themselves. Prior to this period they had been unable to make any sacrifices for charity and education. Only \$150 of the \$1,000 raised for Negro education in 1835 was contributed by persons of color. In 1839, however, the colored

<sup>30</sup> These facts are taken from A. D. Barber's "Report on the Condition of the Colored People in Ohio" and from other articles contributed to *The Philanthropist* in July, 1840.

<sup>31</sup> In this case I have taken the statements of Negroes who were employed in this capacity.

<sup>32</sup> *The Philanthropist*, July 14 and 24, 1840; and May 26, 1841.

<sup>33</sup> Hickok, "The Negro in Ohio," 89.

people raised \$889.30 for this purpose, and thanks to their economic progress, this task was not so difficult as that of raising the \$150 in 1835. They were then spending considerable amounts for evening and writing schools, attended by seventy-five persons, chiefly adults. In 1840 Reverend Mr. Denham and Mr. Goodwin had in their schools sixty-five pupils each paying \$3 per quarter, and Miss Merrill a school of forty-seven pupils paying the same tuition. In all, the colored people were paying these teachers about \$1,300 a year. The only help the Negroes were then receiving was that from the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, which employed one Miss Seymour at a salary of \$300 a year to instruct fifty-four pupils. Moreover, the colored people were giving liberally to objects of charity. Some Negroes burned out in 1839 were promptly relieved by members of their own race. A white family in distress was befriended by a colored woman. The Negroes contributed also to the support of missionaries in Jamaica and during the years from 1836 to 1840 assisted twenty-five emancipated slaves on their way from Cincinnati to Mercer County, Ohio.<sup>34</sup>

During this period they had made progress in other than material things. Their improvement in religion and morals was remarkable. They then had four flourishing Sabbath Schools with 310 regular attendants, one Baptist and two Methodist churches with a membership of 800, a "Total Abstinence Temperance Society" for adults numbering 450, and a "Sabbath School or Youth's Society" of 180 members. A few of these violated their pledges, but when we consider the fact that one fourth of the entire colored population belonged to temperance organizations while less than one tenth of the whites were thus connected, we must admit that this was no mean achievement. Among the Negroes public sentiment was then such that no colored man could openly sell intoxicating drinks. This growing temperance was exhibited, too, in the decreasing fondness for dress and finery. There was less tendency to strive merely to get a fine suit of clothes and exhibit one's self on the streets.

<sup>34</sup> *The Philanthropist*, July 14 and 21, 1840.

Places of vice were not so much frequented and barber shops which on Sundays formerly became a rendezvous for the idle and the garrulous were with few exceptions closed by 1840. This influence of the religious organizations reached also beyond the limits of Cincinnati. A theological student from the State of New York said after spending some time in New Orleans, that the influence of the elevation of the colored people of Cincinnati was felt all the way down the river. Travelers often spoke of the difference in the appearance of barbers and waiters on the boats.<sup>35</sup>

It was in fact a brighter day for the colored people. In 1840 an observer said that they had improved faster than any other people in the city. The *Cincinnati Gazette* after characterizing certain Negroes as being imprudent and vicious, said of others: "Many of these are peaceable and industrious, raising respectable families and acquiring property." <sup>36</sup> Mr. James H. Perkins, a respectable citizen of the city, asserted that the day school which the colored children attended had shown by examination that it was as good as any other in the city. He said further: "There is no question, I presume, that the colored population of Cincinnati, oppressed as it has been by our state laws as well as by prejudice, has risen more rapidly than almost any other people in any part of the world." <sup>37</sup> Within three or four years their property had more than doubled; their schools had become firmly established, and their churches and Sunday Schools had grown as rapidly as any other religious institutions in the city. Trusting to good conduct and character, they had risen to a prosperous position in the eyes of those whose prejudices would "allow them to look through the skin to the soul." <sup>38</sup>

The colored people had had too many enemies in Cincinnati, however, to expect that they had overcome all opposition. The prejudice of certain labor groups against the

<sup>35</sup> *The Philanthropist*, July 21, 1840.

<sup>36</sup> *The Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September 14, 1841.

<sup>37</sup> *The Philanthropist*, July 21, 1840.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Negroes increased in proportion to the prosperity of the latter. That they had been able to do as well as they had was due to the lack of strength on the part of the labor organizations then forming to counteract the sentiment of fair play for the Negroes. Their labor competed directly with that of the whites and began again to excite "jealousy and heart burning."<sup>39</sup> The Germans, who were generally toiling up from poverty, seemed to exhibit less prejudice; but the unfortunate Irish bore it grievously that even a few Negroes should outstrip some of their race in the economic struggle.

In 1841 there followed several clashes which aggravated the situation. In the month of June one Burnett referred to as "a mischievous and swaggering Englishman running a cake shop," had harbored a runaway slave. When a man named McCalla, his reputed master, came with an officer to reclaim the fugitive, Burnett and his family resisted them. The Burnetts were committed to answer for this infraction of the law and finally were adequately punished. The proslavery mob which had gathered undertook to destroy their home but the officials prevented them. Besides, early in August according to a report, a German citizen defending his blackberry patch near the city was attacked by two Negroes and stabbed so severely that he died. Then about three weeks thereafter, according to another rumor, a very respectable lady was insultingly accosted by two colored men, and when she began to flee two others rudely thrust themselves before her on the sidewalk. But in this case, as in most others growing out of rumors, no one could ever say who the lady or her so-called assailants were. At the same time, too, the situation was further aggravated by an almost sudden influx of irresponsible Negroes from various parts, increasing the number of those engaged in noisy frolics which had become a nuisance to certain white neighbors.<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, on Tuesday, the twenty-ninth of August,

<sup>39</sup> *The Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September 14, 1841.

<sup>40</sup> A detailed account of these clashes is given in *The Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September 14, 1841.

there broke out on the corner of Sixth and Broadway a quarrel in which two or three persons were wounded. On the following night the fracas was renewed. A group of ruffians attacked the Dumas Hotel, a colored establishment, on McCallister Street, demanding the surrender of a Negro, who, they believed, was concealed there. As the Negroes of the neighborhood came to the assistance of their friends in the hotel the mob had to withdraw. On Thursday night there took place another clash between a group of young men and boys and a few Negroes who seriously wounded one or two of the former. On Friday evening the mob incited to riotous acts by an influx of white ruffians, seemingly from the steamboats and the Kentucky side of the river, openly assembled in Fifth Street Market without being molested by the police, armed themselves and marched to Broadway and Sixth Street, shouting and swearing. They attacked a colored confectionery store near by, demolishing its doors and windows. James W. Piatt, an influential citizen, and the mayor then addressed the disorderly persons, vainly exhorting them to peace and obedience to the law. Moved by passionate entreaties to execute their poorly prepared plan, the assailants advanced and attacked the Negroes with stones. The blacks, however, had not been idle. They had secured sufficient guns and ammunition to fire into the mob such a volley that it had to fall back. The aggressors rallied again, however, only to be in like manner repulsed. Men were wounded on both sides and carried off and reported dead. The Negroes advanced courageously, and according to a reporter, fired down the street into the mass of ruffians, causing a hasty retreat. This mêlée continued until about one o'clock when a part of the mob secured an iron six pounder, hauled it to the place of combat against the exhortations of the powerless mayor, and fired on the Negroes. With this unusual advantage the blacks were forced to retreat, many of them going to the hills. About two o'clock the mayor of the city brought out a portion of the "military" which succeeded in holding the mob at bay.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *The Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September, 1841.

On the next day the colored people in the district under fire were surrounded by sentinels and put under martial law. Indignation meetings of law-abiding citizens were held on Saturday to pass resolutions, denouncing abolitionists and mobs and making an appeal to the people and the civil authorities to uphold the law. The Negroes also held a meeting and respectfully assured the mayor and citizens that they would use every effort to conduct themselves orderly and expressed their readiness to give bond according to the law of 1807 or leave the city quietly within a specified time. But these steps availed little when the police winked at this violence. The rioters boldly occupied the streets without arrest and continued their work until Sunday. The mayor, sheriff and marshal went to the battle ground about three o'clock but the mob still had control. The officers could not even remove those Negroes who complied with the law of leaving. The authorities finally hit upon the scheme of decreasing the excitement by inducing about 300 colored men to go to jail for security after they had been assured that their wives and children would be protected. The Negroes consented and were accordingly committed, but the cowardly element again attacked these helpless dependents like savages. At the same time other rioters stormed the office of *The Philanthropist* and broke up the press. The mob continued its work until it dispersed from mere exhaustion. The Governor finally came to the city and issued a proclamation setting forth the gravity of the situation. The citizens and civil authorities rallied to his support and strong patrols prevented further disorder.<sup>42</sup>

It is impossible to say exactly how many were killed and wounded on either side. It is probable that several were killed and twenty or thirty variously wounded, though but few dangerously. Forty of the mob were arrested and imprisoned. Exactly what was done with all of them is not yet known. It seems that few, if any of them, however, were severely punished. The Negroes who had been committed

<sup>42</sup> A very interesting account of this riot is given in Howe's "Historical Collections of Ohio," pages 226-228.



for safe keeping were thereafter disposed of in various ways. Some were discharged on certificates of nativity, others gave bond for their support and good behavior, a few were dismissed as non-residents, a number of them were discharged by a justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and the rest were held indefinitely.<sup>43</sup>

This upheaval had two important results. The enemies of the Negroes were convinced that there were sufficient law-abiding citizens to secure to the refugees protection from mob violence; and because of these riots their sympathizers became more attached to the objects of their philanthropy. Abolitionists, Free Soilers and Whigs fearlessly attacked the laws which kept the Negroes under legal and economic disabilities. Petitions praying that these measures be repealed were sent to the legislature. The proslavery element of the State, however, was equally militant. The legislators, therefore, had to consider such questions as extradition and immigration, State aid and colonization, the employment of colored men in the militia service, the extension of the elective franchise, and the admission of colored children to the public schools.<sup>44</sup> Most of these "Black Laws" remained until after the war, but in 1848 they were so modified as to give the Negroes legal standing in courts and to provide for their children such education as a school tax on the property of colored persons would allow<sup>45</sup> and further changed in 1849<sup>46</sup> so as to make the provision for education more effective.

The question of repealing the other oppressive laws came up in the Convention of 1850. It seemed that the cause of the Negroes had made much progress in that a larger num-

<sup>43</sup> It was discovered that not a few of the mob came from Kentucky. About eleven o'clock on Saturday night a bonfire was lighted on that side of the river and loud shouts were sent up as if triumph had been achieved. "In some cases," says a reporter, "the directors were boys who suggested the point of attack, put the vote, declared the result and led the way."—Cin. Daily Gaz., Sept. 14, 1841.

<sup>44</sup> Hickok, "The Negro in Ohio," 90 et seq.

<sup>45</sup> Laws of Ohio, XL, 81.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, LIII, 118.

ber had begun to speak for them. But practically all of the members of the convention who stood for the Negroes were from the Western Reserve. After much heated discussion the colored people were by a large majority of votes still left under the disabilities of being disqualified to sit on juries, unable to obtain a legal residence so as to enter a charitable institution supported by the State, and denied admission to public schools established for white children.<sup>47</sup>

The greatest problem of the Negroes, however, was one of education. There were more persons interested in furnishing them facilities of education than in repealing the prohibitive measures, feeling that the other matters would adjust themselves after giving them adequate training. But it required some time and effort yet before much could be effected in Cincinnati because of the sympathizers with the South. The mere passing of the law of 1849 did not prove to be altogether a victory. Complying with the provisions of this act the Negroes elected trustees, organized a system, and employed teachers, relying on the money allotted them by the law on the basis of a per capita division of the school fund received by the board of education. So great was the prejudice of people of the city that the school officials refused to turn over the required funds on the grounds that the colored trustees were not electors and, therefore, could not be office-holders, qualified to receive and disburse funds. Under the leadership of John I. Gaines, therefore, the trustees called an indignation meeting and raised sufficient money to employ Flamen Ball, an attorney, to secure a writ of mandamus. The case was contested by the city officials, even in the Supreme Court, which decided against the officious whites.<sup>48</sup>

This decision did not solve the whole problem in Cincinnati. The amount raised was small and even had it been adequate to employ teachers, they were handicapped by another decision that no portion of it could be used for

<sup>47</sup> The Convention Debates.

<sup>48</sup> Special Report of the United States Commissioner of Education, 1871, page 372.

building schoolhouses. After a short period of accomplishing practically nothing the law was amended in 1853 <sup>49</sup> so as to transfer the control of such schools to the managers of the white system. This was taken as a reflection on the blacks of the city and tended to make them refuse to cooperate with the white board. On account of the failure of this body to act effectively prior to 1856, the people of color were again given power to elect their own trustees.<sup>50</sup>

During this contest certain Negroes of Cincinnati were endeavoring to make good their claim to equal rights in the public schools. Acting upon this contention a colored man sent his son to a public school which, on account of his presence, became a center of unusual excitement. Isabella Newhall, the teacher, to whom he went, immediately complained to the board of education, requesting that he be expelled because of his color. After "due deliberation" the board of education decided by a vote of 15 to 10 that the colored pupil would have to withdraw. Thereupon two members of that body, residing in the district of the timorous teacher, resigned.<sup>51</sup>

Many Negroes belonging to the mulatto class, however, were more successful in getting into the white schools. In 1849 certain parents complained that children of color were being admitted to the public schools, and in fact there were in one of them two daughters of a white father and a mulatto mother. On complaining about this to the principal of the school in question, the indignant patrons were asked to point out the undesirable pupils. "They could not; for," says Sir Charles Lyell, "the two girls were not only among the best pupils, but better looking and less dark than many of the other pupils."<sup>52</sup>

Thereafter, however, much progress in the education of the colored people among themselves was noted. By 1844

<sup>49</sup> Laws of Ohio.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, LIII, 118.

<sup>51</sup> *The New York Tribune*, February 19, 1855.

<sup>52</sup> Lyell, "A Second Visit to the United States of North America," II, 295, 296.

they had six schools of their own and before the war two well-supported public schools.<sup>53</sup> Among their teachers were such useful persons as Mrs. M. J. Corbin, Miss Lucy Blackburn, Miss Anne Ryall, Miss Virginia C. Tilley, Miss Martha E. Anderson, William H. Parham, William R. Casey, John G. Mitchell and Peter H. Clark.<sup>54</sup> The pupils were showing their appreciation by regular attendance, excellent deportment, and progress in the acquisition of knowledge. Speaking of these Negroes in 1855, John P. Foote said that they shared with the white citizens that respect for education and the diffusion of knowledge, which has been one of their "characteristics," and that they had, therefore, been more generally intelligent than free persons of color not only in other parts of this country but in all other parts of the world.<sup>55</sup> It was in appreciation of the worth of this class to the community that in 1844<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Longworth helped them to establish an orphan asylum and in 1858 built for them a comfortable school building, leasing it with a privilege of purchasing it within four years.<sup>57</sup> They met these requirements within the stipulated time and in 1859 secured through other agencies the construction of another building in the western portion of the city.

The most successful of these schools, however, was the Gilmore High School, a private institution founded by an English clergyman. This institution offered instruction in the fundamentals and in some vocational studies. It was supported liberally by the benevolent element of the white people and patronized and appreciated by the Negroes as the first and only institution offering them the opportunity for thorough training. It became popular throughout the country, attracting Negroes from as far South as New Or-

<sup>53</sup> *The Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, June 26, 1844, August 6, 1844, and January 1, 1845.

<sup>54</sup> *The Cincinnati Directory of 1860*.

<sup>55</sup> Foote, "The Schools of Cincinnati," 92.

<sup>56</sup> *The Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, August 23, 1844.

<sup>57</sup> Special Report of the United States Commissioner of Education, 372.

leans.<sup>58</sup> Rich Southern planters found it convenient to have their mulatto children educated in this high school.<sup>59</sup>

The work of these schools was substantially supplemented by that of the colored churches. They directed their attention not only to moral and religious welfare of the colored people but also to their mental development. Through their well-attended Sunday-schools these institutions furnished many Negroes of all classes the facilities of elementary education. Such opportunities were offered at the Baker Street Baptist Church, the Third Street Baptist Church, the Colored Christian Church, the New Street Methodist Church, and the African Methodist Church. Among the preachers then promoting this cause were John Warren, Rufus Conrad, Henry Simpson, and Wallace Shelton. Many of the old citizens of Cincinnati often refer with pride to the valuable services rendered by these leaders.

In things economic the Negroes were exceptionally prosperous after the forties. Cincinnati had then become a noted pork-packing and manufacturing center. The increasing canal and river traffic and finally the rise of the railroad system tended to make it thrive more than ever. Many colored men grew up with the city. A Negro had in the East End on Calvert Street a large cooperage establishment which made barrels for the packers. Knight and Bell were successful contractors noted for their skill and integrity and employed by the best white people of the city. Robert Harlan made considerable money buying and selling race horses. Thompson Cooley had a successful pickling establishment. On Broadway A. V. Thompson, a colored tailor, conducted a thriving business. J. Pressley and Thomas Ball were the well-known photographers of the city, established in a handsomely furnished modern gallery which was patronized by some of the wealthiest people. Samuel T. Wilcox, who owed his success to his position as a steward on an Ohio River line, thereafter went into the grocery business and built up

<sup>58</sup> Simmons, "Men of Mark," 490.

<sup>59</sup> A white slaveholder, a graduate of Amherst, taught in this school. See *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, June 26, 1844.

such a large trade among the aristocratic families that he accumulated \$59,000 worth of property by 1859.<sup>60</sup>

A more useful Negro had for years been toiling upward in this city. This man was Henry Boyd, a Kentucky freed-man, who had helped to overcome the prejudice against colored mechanics in that city by exhibiting the highest efficiency. He patented a corded bed which became very popular, especially in the Southwest. With this article he built up a creditable manufacturing business, employing from 18 to 25 white and colored men.<sup>61</sup> He was, therefore, known as one of the desirable men of the city. Two things, however, seemingly interfered with his business. In the first place, certain white men, who became jealous of his success, burned him out and the insurance companies refused to carry him any longer. Moreover, having to do chiefly with white men he was charged by his people with favoring the miscegenation of races. Whether or not this was well founded is not yet known, but his children and grandchildren did marry whites and were lost in the so-called superior race.

A much more interesting Negro appeared in Cincinnati, however, in 1847. This was Robert Gordon, formerly the slave of a rich yachtsman of Richmond, Virginia. His master turned over to him a coal yard which he handled so faithfully that his owner gave him all of the slack resulting from the handling of the coal. This he sold to the local manufacturers and blacksmiths of the city, accumulating thereby in the course of time thousands of dollars. He purchased himself in 1846 and set out for free soil. He went first to Philadelphia and then to Newburyport, but finding that these places did not suit him, he proceeded to Cincinnati. He arrived there with \$15,000, some of which he immediately invested in the coal business in which he had already achieved

<sup>60</sup> These facts were obtained from oral statements of Negroes who were living in Cincinnati at this time; from M. R. Delany's "The Condition of the Colored People in the United States"; from A. D. Barber's "Report on the Condition of the Colored People in Ohio," 1840; and from various Cincinnati Directories.

<sup>61</sup> Delany, "The Condition of the Colored People in the United States," 92.

marked success. He employed bookkeepers, had his own wagons, built his own docks on the river, and bought coal by barges.<sup>62</sup>

Unwilling to see this Negro do so well, the white coal dealers endeavored to force him out of the business by lowering the price to the extent that he could not afford to sell. They did not know of his acumen and the large amount of capital at his disposal. He sent to the coal yards of his competitors mulattoes who could pass for white, using them to fill his current orders from his foes' supplies that he might save his own coal for the convenient day. In the course of a few months the river and all the canals by which coal was brought to Cincinnati froze up and remained so until spring. Gordon was then able to dispose of his coal at a higher price than it had ever been sold in that city. This so increased his wealth and added to his reputation that no one thereafter thought of opposing him.

Gordon continued in the coal business until 1865 when he retired. During the Civil War he invested his money in United States bonds. When these bonds were called in, he invested in real estate on Walnut Hills, which he held until his death in 1884. This estate descended to his daughter Virginia Ann Gordon who married George H. Jackson, a descendant of slaves in the Custis family of Arlington, Virginia. Mr. Jackson is now a resident of Chicago and is managing this estate.<sup>63</sup> Having lived through the antebellum and subsequent periods, Mr. Jackson has been made to wonder whether the Negroes of Cincinnati are doing as well to-day as Gordon and his colaborers were. This question requires some attention, but an inquiry as to exactly what forces have operated to impede the progress of a work so auspiciously begun would lead us beyond the limits set for this dissertation.

C. G. WOODSON

<sup>62</sup> The Cincinnati Directory for 1860.

<sup>63</sup> For the leading facts concerning the life of Robert Gordon I have depended on the statements of his children and acquaintances and on the various directories and documents giving evidence concerning the business men of Cincinnati.